
Shigellosis

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is an infectious disease caused by bacteria (*Shigella*) in the intestines.

What are the symptoms of shigellosis?

The main symptoms of shigellosis are fever, diarrhea, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea, and vomiting. Symptoms are likely to be sudden or severe. Stools may be bloody. Most who are infected with *Shigella* develop symptoms a day or two after they are exposed to the bacteria. Shigellosis usually resolves in 5 to 7 days. Some persons who are infected may have no symptoms at all, but may still pass the *Shigella* bacteria to others.

How is shigellosis spread?

Shigella is found in a person's stool (bowel movement). It is easily spread to others when infected people do not wash their hands after using the bathroom or after changing the diaper of a child with this illness. This is one of the easiest illnesses to give to others because it only takes a few bacteria to make you sick.

Food may become contaminated by infected food handlers who forget to wash their hands with soap after using the bathroom. Vegetables can become contaminated if they are harvested from a field with sewage in it. Outbreaks are common in crowded areas or under poor sanitary conditions.

Water may become contaminated with *Shigella* bacteria if sewage runs into it, or if someone with shigellosis swims in or plays with it (especially in splash tables, untreated wading pools, or shallow play fountains used by daycare centers). *Shigella* infections can then be acquired by drinking, swimming in, or playing with the contaminated water.

How common is shigellosis?

Every year, about 14,000 cases of shigellosis are reported in the United States. Because many milder cases are not diagnosed or reported, the actual number of infections may be twenty times greater. It is more common in summer than winter. Children, especially toddlers aged 2 to 4, are the most likely to get shigellosis.

How is shigellosis diagnosed?

Many different kinds of germs can cause diarrhea, so establishing the cause will help guide treatment. Determining that *Shigella* is the cause of the illness depends on laboratory tests that identify *Shigella* in the stools of an infected person. The laboratory can also do special tests to determine which antibiotics, if any, would be best to treat the infection.

What is the treatment for shigellosis?

Persons with mild infections usually recover on their own. However, appropriate antibiotic treatment kills *Shigella* bacteria, and may shorten the illness by a few days. If your doctor prescribes you an antibiotic, make sure you use all the medicine. Do not stop

taking the medicine even if you feel better. It is important to continue drinking liquids until symptoms go away to help prevent dehydration.

Are there complications from shigellosis?

Shigella can cause serious illness in the very young, elderly, or the ill. Persons with shigellosis in the United States rarely require hospitalization. In some cases, the diarrhea can lead to dehydration (excessive loss of body fluids). It is important for people with shigellosis to drink plenty of fluids. A severe infection with high fever may be associated with seizures in children less than 2 years old.

How can shigellosis be prevented?

Handwashing with soap and running water is the most important measure to stop the spread of *Shigella*, especially before preparing food and eating, and after using the bathroom or changing diapers.

If you have shigellosis, do not prepare food. Clean and disinfect the bathroom, including the toilet handle, water faucets, and door knob with a bleach solution (one part bleach in 10 parts water) every day.

When children are infected with *Shigella* you should make sure to help them wash their hands after changing diapers or using the bathroom. Put disposable diapers in a plastic bag and throw out in a tightly closed garbage can. Keep sick children away from other children until they are well. Wash dirty sheets and clothes in hot soapy water and dry in a dryer. Wash and disinfect toys that can be put in a child's mouth after each use with bleach solution.

If you are a food service worker, healthcare worker, or childcare worker, report your illness to your supervisor and do not work until you illness is over and your medical provider says it is OK to return to work.

How do I get more information on shigella?

Calhoun County Public Health Department
Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Phone: 800-CDC-INFO

Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/shigellosis/>

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This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

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